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ABSTRACT

This paper offers reasons why Native American culture and history should be included in the secondary school curriculum based on the fact that many ideas and products that are taken for granted today have Native American roots, and on the definition of social studies as the study of individual and group behaviors of a people, and of how those behaviors correspond with the environment. Using multiculturalism, Native American studies can be incorporated into an overall social studies curriculum. Cultural awareness and sensitivity toward the Native American can lead to a better understanding and respect for one's own culture as well as the Native American culture. This paper discusses the contributions to U.S. democratic society by Native American political structure, especially the Iroquois League. The Iroquois model of combining sovereign units into one government is now known as the federal system in which each state has power over internal affairs and the national government regulates affairs common to all. The power to impeach an elected official also is derived from the Iroquois system. In the Iroquois system, if a sachem, or delegate, elected by a tribe to represent that tribe at a council of one of five Indian nations that made up the Iroquois League, appeared improper or lost the confidence of his electorate, the women of his clan impeached and expelled him and chose a new sachem. The founding fathers adopted the impeachment process but omitted women from the right to vote and from any other major role in the political structure. (DK)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

A Rationale for Native American Studies in a Secondary School Curriculum

by

James F. Hill

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Are there reasons for the study of the Native American? Many of the ideas and products we take for granted today have Native American roots. Our drugs, foods, democratic form of government, personal liberty, geographical place names all originate from the Native American. The definition of Social Studies can also be used as a rationale for the study of the Native American.

In the modern secondary school system, the study of Social Studies is a required course. It is the study of individual and group behaviors of a people are studied and how these behaviors correspond with the environment. Two key elements of high school Social Studies curriculum are the study of History and Sociology. History outlines a group's contributions to their society and how their contributions affect modern behavior. Sociology is the study of cultures. Cultures can be defined as a groups adaptation to a changing environment or its way of life. It also includes social structure, knowledge, belief and customs. (1)

Taking this definition of Social Studies and its two key elements into the decision process, shouldn't the Native American history and culture be included in a secondary school curriculum?

Using multiculturalism, Native America studies can be incorporated into an overall Social Studies Curriculum. Cultural awareness and sensitivity toward the Native American should be

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promoted. This will lead to a better understanding and respect for one's own culture as well as the Native American culture. Ethnocentrism, the belief that the Anglo culture is superior to the Native American culture could be reduced or eliminated. Racism, stereotyping, bigotry and discrimination against the Native American will decrease. (2)

Through a multicultural curriculum, students will begin to appreciate all cultures and will be able to illustrate contributions made by the Native Americans. They will began to see the Native American point of view and realize that ignoring Native American studies and the Native American contributions are detrimental to all. Has the Native American contributed to overall American society?

The foundation of our democratic society has Native American roots. Benjamin Franklin, one of our founding fathers, became intimately familiar with the Native American political culture, in particular with the League of the Iroquois, in his first diplomatic assignment as Indian Commissioner in the 1750s. Franklin advocated that the new American government incorporate many of the features of the government of the Iroquois.

The Iroquois League united five principal Indian nations - the Mohawk, Orondaga, Seneca, Oneida and Cayuga. Each of these nations had a council composed of delegates called sachems who were elected by the tribes of that nation. Each of these nations governed its own territory and its own council met to decide the issues of public policy for each nation. These councils exercised jurisdiction within each nation. Council powers were

very similar to the individual government of the colonies.

Sachems then formed a grand council of the League in which all sachems sat together to discuss issues of common concern. They made decisions affecting the whole League of the Iroquois. Each sachem in the Council had equal authority and privileges. His power was dependent upon his oratorical power to persuade. Their power extended to all matters of common concern. In short, they had the power to declare war, make peace, enter into treaties, receive new members and take measures to promote their prosperity and enlarge their dominion.

Today the Iroquois model of combining sovereign units into one government is called the federal system in which each state has power over internal affairs and the national government regulates affairs common to all. (3) Knowing where our democratic traditions came from is a rationale for Native American studies.

The power to impeach an elected official is also is a copied from the Iroquois system. In their system, if a sachem appeared improper or lost the confidence of his electorate the women of his clan impeached him and expelled him. Then the women chose a new sachem. The founding fathers saw the wisdom of the impeachment process but omitted women the right to vote or any other major role in the political structure. It would be several centuries before American women were granted the right to vote. Isn't the study of the Native American system of allowing women political power a justification for Native American studies?

The Iroquois tradition of admitting new nations into the league was codified into American law through the Congressional Resolution of 1780, the Land Ordinance of 1784 and 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance. This system admitted new states as members rather than keeping them colonies. The west became a series of territories and then states. (4)

One of the most important political institutions borrowed from the Indians was the caucus. The word caucus comes from the Algonquian language. The caucus permits informal discussion of an issue. The caucus became a mainstream of American democracy both in the Congress and in political and community groups all over the country. Today Americans use the caucus system to nominate their presidential candidates. (5)

During the struggle for independence, rebellious colonists organized themselves into councils. One of the earliest groups was the Tammany society, named after a Delaware Indian called Chief Tammany, who greeted William Penn as his quest to form an American colony. These societies followed an Indian model of organization. They formed thirteen tribes to represent the thirteen colonies and each tribe had its own totem. The general members were called braves. The Grand sachem presided over thirteen other sachems. The Great Grand Sachem was the President of the United States.

After the American Revolution, the Tammany societies became the first veterans organization of men who fought in the Revolutionary War as common soldiers. Membership came from the middle and skilled working classes of America. All were devoted

to liberty and freedom. The Tammany Society functioned as a political party, a social club and a trade Union. (6) Eventually America began to celebrate St. Tammany's Day on the first of May. The first observed celebration came on May 1, 1778 at Valley Forge. Imagine a liberty celebration, similar to the 4th of July, named after a Delaware Indian Chief, isn't that justification for a Native American studies program in a secondary school?

A famous boys and girls organization has its roots in the Native American Society. Ernest Thompson Selton formed woodcraft Indian societies that were based on Indian models. Seton wanted the boys to learn self-reliance, and work to fulfill absolute standards rather than to compete with one another. He organized then into self governing tribes and encouraged to build character through the virtues of honesty, thrift and helpfulness. Seton's woodcraft society merged, in North America, with the British version of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts that evolved into the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts as we know them today. (7)

Most of the writers of the European Enlightenment described Indian personal liberty, freedom from rulers and the lack of social classes based on property ownership. The writers became aware that the Indians were living in social harmony and prosperity without the rule of a king in a kind of utopia. An early example of these writing was a book by Sir Thomas More called Utopia, which is still in print today.

The greatest political radical to follow the example of the Indian personal liberty was Thomas Paine. In his works such as

Common Sense, he called for American liberty and independence from Great Britain. Some of the questions he raised in a later book called Agrarian still haunt us today. Can a civilized society ever cure the poverty it has created? As American poverty levels increase and more people become homeless, the answer is obviously - no.

The Native American concept of personal liberty or the "Noble savage" living in a natural state, developed into many concepts such as utopian, socialism, communism and anarchism. One form of anarchism, pacifist anarchism was outlined in the works of Henry David Thoreau as civil disobedience. This method of civil disobedience was used by Gandhi in his struggle for Indian (India) independence from Great Britain. Later Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would use Gandhi's methods in the Civil rights movement of the 1960s.(8)

What would a Thanksgiving dinner be without the following foods: Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, turkey and cranberries? These foods were all cultivated by Native Americans and in most were exported to Europe. Let's just trace the history of the potato. After several years of grain crop failures, European monarchs such as Catherine the Great of Russia forced peasants to grow potatoes. Russia's adoption of the potato as their staple food proceeded their rule as a world power. The potato promoted a new source of vitamin C in the long winter months of the Northern European climate, causing a general improvement of health. With the introduction of the potato, nutritional diseases disappeared and the population

rapidly increased.(9)

The monarchs also knew that a field of potatoes produces more food, more nutrition, more reliably than the same field planted with grain. A hectare of land planted with potato produces 7.5 million calories compared with 4.2 million calories planted with wheat. Even now scientists are working to expand the potato into new environments, develop new ways of growing potatoes and preserve its nutrition longer. They hope the potato can feed starving nations of the world as it once fed the nations Europe two hundred years ago. (10) Could the humble potato first cultivated by Native Americans stop world hunger?

Many modern drugs we use today were first used by Native Americans. The cure for malaria, quinine, comes from a bark used by Incas of the Andes. Records in 1877 in Virginia showed that one in five colonists died of malaria, but after the introduction of quinine no one died of malaria. (11) A dramatic change! The Indians of North America used the bark of the poplar tree to cure headaches. It was centuries later that the active ingredient of the Indian cure, salicim, closely resembles what is found in aspirin today.

Still chewed today by Native Americans in South America, the cocoa leaf has a long medical history. By 1850 the cocoa leafs' active ingredient was discovered to be cocaine. It's first use as an anesthesia came in the 1880 during eye surgery. Later, chemists synthesized cocaine into procaine which is used today under the trademark Novacaine. (12)

John Styth Pemberton of Atlanta used the Native American ingredient of cocaine to produce a popular drink. He first marketed a drink called French wine cocoa. Realizing that there were many alcoholic drinks on the market, he began experimenting. He dropped the wine, added caffeine and African cola favoring- the result was cocoa cola. Asa Griggs Candler bought up the interest from Pemberton and began to build an empire. The cocaine in the cocoa cola was not removed until the 1920s. The kick or "pep" from this drink and two others on the market Dr. Pepper and Pepsi came from the caffeine and cocaine in them.

The soft drink industry in America grew out of traveling medicine shows who employed Native Americans as proof that their medicines or Indian tonics were genuine. The most successful of the traveling show was the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company which sold for $250,000 in 1911 after 30 years of performances. (13)

What would Americans do without their Cocoa Cola, Pepsi or Dr. Pepper? All three contained Native American ingredients.

Indian place names help us understand where we are on this continent and help give us our local identity. The city of Seattle is the largest city named after a Native American. Chief Seal'th lived in the area of present day Seattle from about 1786 to 1866, and has a monument in the city. In books he has been quoted on his views about his method to assure equitable relations between ethnic groups.

There are many states with Indian names, or named after the different tribes in the area. The origin of some state names came from the Dakota, Kansa, the Massachuset, the Illini and

Utes. Some have Indian names that describe the land or the water. Iowa is Sioux for "beautiful land," Wyoming means large prairie in Algonquin. Michigan is Ojibwa for "great water," Minnesota is Sioux for "waters that reflect the sky." Nebraska means "flat" in Omaha; Ohio means "good river" in Iroquios, Connecticut means "long river"; Kentucky means "dark and bloody ground." Oregon means "beautiful water" in Algonquin. Missouri means "water flowing along" in Dakota. Cities such as Wheeling, Pasadena, Tallahasse, Pontiac, Cheyenne and Buffalo all come from Native American names. Mountain ranges and rivers have Native American names.

There many reasons for the study of the Native Americans; students should be familiar with them. The very foundations of our democratic society were laid by the Native Americans from their political and social organizations. Our "federal" system of national and state government is a copy of the Iroquois model. Their system of allowing women a political voice has just recently been implemented in this country. The way we choose presidential candidates was originally an Indian system. The civil rights movement of Dr. Martin Luther King in its peaceful way of civil disobedience has roots in Indian personal liberty. The foods we eat, for the most part, were originally cultivated by the Native American. The Cocoa Cola, Pepsi, and Dr. Pepper we consume all have Native American ingredients. Place names with Indian names give us local identity.

The world has yet to fully utilize all the contributions the Native American gave us. Their plant knowledge has barely been

tapped. Could there be a cure for cancer, AIDS or heart disease in a plant that the Native American used that modern society does not know about? The knowledge of the exterminated tribes during the settlement of Anglo Americans may never be known. Sadly, we know more about the pyramids of Egypt, the poetry of the ancient Chinese, and the Greeks and Romans than we know about the Native Americans.

Yes, Columbus arrived in America, but the knowledge of Native Americans was not discovered - it was swept aside in the search for wealth. In the Native American knowledge we could have found a different more useful, unselfish kind of wealth.

FOOTNOTES

1. Hap Gilliland, Teaching the Native American,(Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1988) p. 85.

2. John Reyhner, Teaching the Indian Child,(Billings: Eastern Montana College, 1988), pp 56.

3. Jack Weatherford, Indian Givers, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc, 1988), pp 136-137.

4. Ibid, p. 139.

5. Ibid, p. 145.

6. Jack Weatherford, Native Roots (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1991) p. 187.

7. Ibid, pp 191-193.

8. Weatherford, Indian Givers, p.131.

9. Ibid, p.68.

10. Ibid, p. 78.

11. Ibid, pp 177-178.

12. Ibid, p. 190.

13. Ibid, pp. 191-192.

14. Weatherford, Native Roots, pp. 214-233.

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